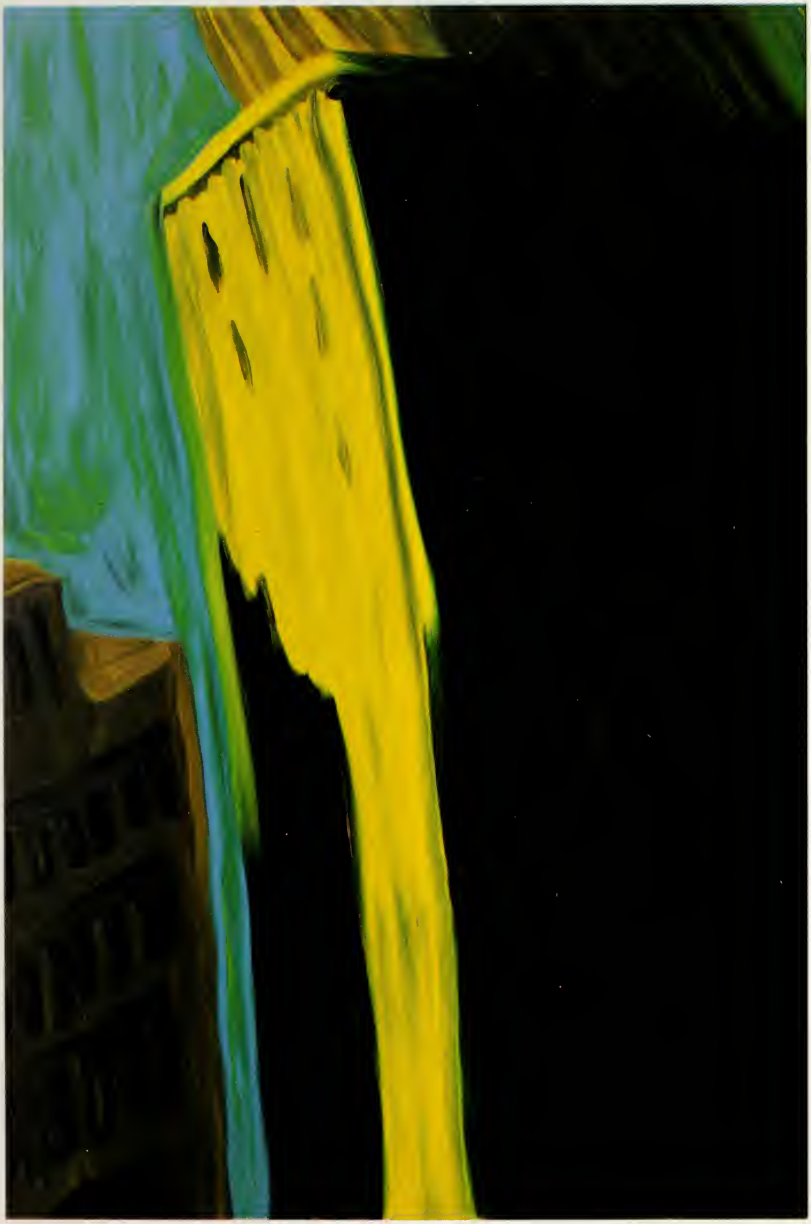

MARTHA DIAMOND

BOWDOIN COLLEGE MUSEUM OF ART BRUNSWICK, MAINE 1988

This catalogue accompanies
an exhibition of the
same name at the
Bowdoin College
Museum of Art
from January 29
to March 24, 1988.

COVER:
High C, 1982
oil on canvas
84 x 56 inches

PRINTING BY
Penmor Lithographers,
Lewiston, Maine

DESIGN BY
Michael Mahan Graphics,
Bath, Maine

ISBN
0-916606-18-X

Library of Congress
Catalog Card Number
87-73462

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Heavy Duty, 1983
oil on canvas
96 x 48 inches

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Martha Diamond is an urban romantic, streetwise and wide-eyed, an artist enraptured by the utter marvel of Manhattan. A native New Yorker, she is still struck by the place. It is the dominant theme of her art, seizing her imagination like a fever. In her paintings the city takes on the aspect of a vision. Forms and shadows of buildings loom out of a dense ether of color. The eye floats free, jerked upward by the soar of a skyscraper or plunged through girders into blue space. The city is queerly uninhabited. Here the human drama is less dramatic than the scenery.

Intentionally rough and gawky, Diamond's paintings convey the vigor and raw honesty of a first sketch. Indeed, each painting is a close translation of a smaller oil study. In both the studies and finished paintings, the factual realities are dumb-simple and not really important. The paintings are not about architecture, or specifically New York, or the "urban scene." They describe little and explain less. Yet they have a *gestalt* rightness, a visceral, wordless claim to truth. They linger in the mind like a retinal afterimage.

In common with other expressionist artists, Diamond relies upon the eccentric workings of imagination. She delights in the apparently random incidents of memory: a pattern of windows, a leap of space, or the eerie wash of spotlight against an office tower. On canvas she endows these incidents with poetic force: an ascending rhythm of balconies acquires the resonance of a mantra.

In one telling respect, Diamond's vision of the city is postmodern—or perhaps *antimodern*. At the beginning of this century artists in the avant-garde celebrated the metropolis as the heroic affirmation of the modernist spirit. They saw only reason and bright promise where today we see perplexity and dull void. In Diamond's paintings, the city seems no longer of our making but the sublimest work of Nature. Borrowing the rhetoric of romantic landscape, she invests the city with a primordial grandeur. The buildings heave up and weather into fantastic shapes. Standing on the edge, on the cornice or window sill, we are left to gape and wonder at the spectacle of it all. There is awe and mystery in these images, and a terrible silence last heard in the wilderness paintings of the Hudson River school. For this artist the city has become our wilderness.

JOHN W. COFFEY
Curator of Collections

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

All works in the exhibition courtesy
of Robert Miller Gallery, New York

1. *Facade*, 1982
   oil on canvas
   84 x 56 inches

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   oil on canvas
   72 x 60 inches

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   oil on canvas
   96 x 120 inches

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9. *Windows*, 1985
   oil on canvas
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This exhibition continues the Bowdoin College Museum of Art's series of shows devoted to important contemporary artists associated with Maine. Martha Diamond is a New York painter who now summers on Deer Isle. Like many artists, she has found a harmony between the frenzy of Manhattan and the pastorale of coastal Maine. Nevertheless, Diamond's work is passionately urban, both in subject and sensibility, and gives us proof—if proof is needed—of the enduring vitality of the city for American artists of this century.

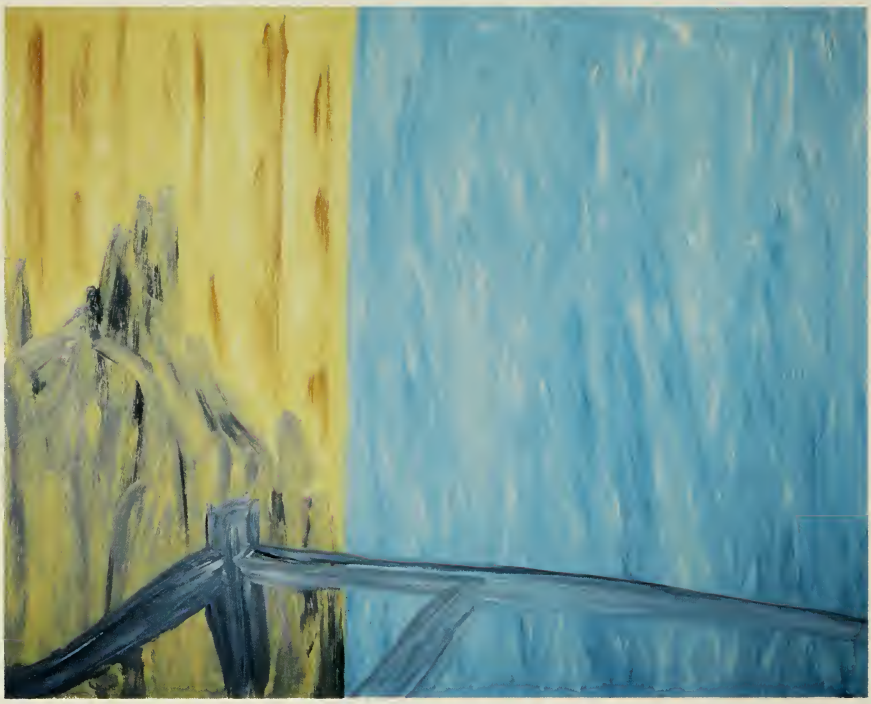
The exhibition has been organized by the museum's curator, John W. Coffey, who also wrote the introduction to this catalogue. Mr. Coffey has been ably assisted by the entire museum staff. Special thanks are due to Elizabeth A. Mullen '88, who assisted in the compilation of biographical material. The catalogue was edited by Susan L. Ransom and designed by Michael W. Mahan '73. Publication was supervised by Lucie G. Teegarden, associate director of public relations and publications.

Complementing this exhibition of Martha Diamond's paintings is a concurrent show of her graphic work at the Portland Museum of Art. Both shows were developed collaboratively by Mr. Coffey and Margaret K. Burchenal, former director of education at the Portland museum.

The museum is grateful to the artist's New York dealer, Robert Miller, and his staff for arranging loans. Finally we offer our thanks and deep appreciation to Martha Diamond.

CLIFTON C. OLDS
Acting Director,
Bowdoin College Museum of Art
Edith Cleaves Barry
Professor of the History and
Criticism of Art

Central Character, 1983
oil on canvas, three parts
each part: 90 x 30 inches



High View, 1985
oil on canvas
96 x 120 inches

1981 *Art on Paper*, Weatherspoon Art Gallery, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, North Carolina

Paintings, Brooke Alexander, Inc., New York

Exchanges III, Arts for Living Center, New York

1980 *Almost Abstract*, Boston College Art Gallery, Newton, Massachusetts

New York/New Work, Delahunty Gallery, Dallas, Texas

Drawing of a Different Nature, Portland Center for the Visual Arts, Portland, Oregon

1979 *New Publications/Acquisitions*, Brooke Alexander, Inc., New York

New York Artists: New Sensibilities, 22 Wooster Gallery, New York

Sixth British International Print Biennale, Bradford Art Galleries and Museums, Bradford, England

New Work by Martha Diamond, Margo Margolis, Rodney Ripps, Brooke Alexander, Inc., New York

1978 *Thick Paint*, Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, Illinois

New Editions, Brooke Alexander, Inc., New York

Critics' Choice, Joe and Emily Lowe Art Gallery, Syracuse University, New York

1976 *Paintings '75, '76, '77*, Sarah Lawrence College Art Gallery, Bronxville, New York

New Abstract Objects, Hallwalls, Buffalo, New York

1974 *Tenth Anniversary Exhibition*, Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, Connecticut

Six Artists, Julian Pretto Gallery, New York

1973 *Contemporary Reflections*, Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, Connecticut

MARTHA DIAMOND

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